

CHAPTER 6

Design, Character & Quality

Introduction

The design, character, and quality of Lynchburg's built environment strongly influences its livability and economic vitality. The City's image is shaped by the character and quality of its neighborhoods, commercial districts, employment centers, and public streets and spaces. Residents and visitors, as well as existing and prospective business owners, appreciate places that are safe, attractive, and well cared for. Such appreciation provides the foundation for investment—investment in the preservation of sensitive historic and natural resources, the revitalization of commercial districts and neighborhoods, the improvement of public facilities and spaces, and the building of new places that respect the City's architectural, natural, and cultural heritage.

For over 200 years, Lynchburg's built environment has been shaped by the actions of scores of individuals, property owners, builders, developers, institutions, and public agencies. From the early decision to apply a street grid on the hills overlooking the James River to the building of Wyndhurst, the City's newest neighborhood and commercial center, people have sought ways to create places that are functional as well as memorable and beautiful. Monument Terrace offers an excellent example of how thoughtful design can elevate an investment in public infrastructure—in this case a stair linking public buildings on Church and Court Streets—to a place of exceptional beauty.

Context & Recommendations

Good Design is Good for Business & the Community

It has long been understood that quality design contributes to the intrinsic value of a community. Recent research into the economic impact of design takes this understanding one step further—design quality affects the bottom line. As part of the process of preparing this Comprehensive Plan, research was undertaken to identify key attributes of quality design and to gain an understanding of its potential economic value. This research, summarized below, can form a basis for developing public policy initiatives focusing on tools, both regulatory and incentive-based, that might be used to improve the environmental quality, design, and aesthetics of existing and future development in Lynchburg. (A more detailed summary of the research findings on this subject can be found in a technical memorandum titled,

Design, Character & Quality

“The Economic Value of Design & Environmental Quality,” by Economics Research Associates, 2002).

Benefits to the Community

Introducing higher quality landscaping and varied amenities in new projects can ultimately affect an entire community by stimulating a higher expectation or standard of quality. This can be a contributing factor in elevating the standards followed by subsequent project developers and spurring local governments to improve their design standards to reflect the higher aesthetic values and character created by the original project. One of the key benefits of strong design is that it strengthens the “quality of life” for a community’s residents. This aspect of design serves not only individual residents, but the collective community as well. Many communities with active historic preservation and downtown revitalization programs experience an increase in property values, new employment, and tourism. A community’s overall quality of life is a significant factor when businesses are determining where to locate. The community as a whole benefits when projects incorporate open space and environmental protection measures, particularly in sites that contain sensitive habitat or terrain. Research indicates that local public officials have begun to recognize that they spend less in public funds to fix environmental problems when development is well-designed in the first place. Fewer expenditures are needed for stormwater drainage system retrofits, water pollution control measures, and stream restoration. The wider community also benefits when development projects containing open space and recreational facilities lessen the need to provide these facilities with public tax dollars.

Benefits to Project Residents

There is substantial evidence supporting the claim that the degree of quality of landscaping and amenities in residential development projects plays a significant role in influencing the final decisions of potential buyers and renters. People are drawn to a specific project because it offers a combination of design elements and amenities that provide a distinctive feel and sense of community. Projects with scenic or natural views and amenities are quite desirable to potential residents. Many homeowners believe that paying more for better quality landscaping and amenities is wise. This is because they view their home as a long-term investment and the increased outlays for amenities will increase their return-on-investment at the time of resale.

Benefits to Commercial Project Tenants

Case studies profiling commercial projects, such as office parks and shopping centers, indicate that the presence and quality of landscaping and amenities play a significant role in a tenant’s decision to locate there, as well as the duration of their lease. Active recreational amenities, such as health clubs and jogging trails, and passive amenities, such as landscaped green space and informal seating areas,

are appreciated by project users. Commercial tenants note that quality landscaping and amenities have a positive effect upon employee productivity and morale. Retailers contend that quality site planning, landscaping, architectural design, and overall project amenities can influence the customer's enjoyment of the shopping environment and, ultimately, sales.

Benefits to the Real Estate Development Community

Developers believe that an appropriate mix of landscaping and amenities allows a project to draw the attention of prospective tenants and, at the same time, maintain its existing tenant base by providing a desirable environment. Most developers interviewed as part of the research agree that the investment in such amenities enhances the overall profitability of a particular project. Even though none were able to quantify the return, estimates by several developers suggest that projects with high quality landscaping and amenities generally capture rental rates that are at least five percent higher than competitive properties in the marketplace. Projects with such amenities have higher rates of absorption than other projects in the competitive marketplace that contains inferior or fewer such offerings. In many projects, gaining the support of the community and public officials is a critical ingredient in the development process. Thoughtful site planning and appropriate landscaping and design features tend to enhance a developer's ability to gain the necessary public approvals and win community support. Developers strongly believe that quality planning, architecture, landscape architecture, and provision of amenities significantly contribute to the image, identity, sense of community, and, ultimately, the marketability of a project.

In summary, research supports the premise that all community stakeholders can benefit from good design. These stakeholders include real estate developers, project residents, mortgage lenders, commercial tenants, and members of the surrounding community. A city can affect the quality of the built environment by elevating the design standards in the economic marketplace to reflect a clear community desire for higher quality living and working environments. This can be done by translating that desire into local tools and programs that encourage good design in all public and private development, redevelopment, and revitalization projects.

Lynchburg Citizens Support Good Design

In numerous public meetings, workshops, and Citizen Steering Committee meetings, Lynchburg residents shared their concern about the quality and character of development. While residents expressed appreciation for the City's significant stock of historic structures and praised recent efforts by private property owners to renovate and restore older buildings downtown and in the City's historic neighborhoods, they were less pleased with the lack of investment along the City's traditional commercial streets, the lack of landscaping and amenities along public streets, and the poor condition of structures in several older neighborhoods. The

Design, Character & Quality

quality of development along the City's older commercial streets (e.g., 5th Street, 12th Street, and Main Street) is of great concern to many City residents, as is development along primary commercial corridors (including Memorial Avenue, Fort Avenue, Wards Road, Timberlake Road, Lakeside Drive, and Campbell Avenue).

Participants in meetings and workshops held throughout the planning process pointed to the following in describing their concern for the quality of the City's built environment:

- Minimal landscaping and trees along streets and in parking areas;
- Large number, height, and size of commercial signs;
- Generic quality of design used by many franchise businesses;
- Absence of facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists, including sidewalks and crosswalks;
- High vacancy rates in older commercial buildings and strip centers;
- Glare from unshielded or overly bright lights;
- Unattractiveness of overhead power lines;
- Poor quality of stormwater facilities and detention ponds;
- Lack of buffering and poor transitions between commercial and residential areas;
- Extensive clearing of mature trees and forested areas.

To gain a better understanding of resident design perceptions and preferences, the City hosted a lecture on community design and conducted a Community Character Survey. While the lecture was designed to raise awareness of planning, design, and preservation issues, the survey was used to collect information and spark discussion about the quality of development in the City's neighborhoods and commercial areas and along its streets and roads.

Over 175 individuals participated in the Community Character Survey during public workshops held the evenings of July 16-19, 2001, at locations throughout the City. These workshops were extensively advertised and open to the public. Survey participants received a booklet with images and instructions on how to record their impressions of the images. Over one hundred images were included in the booklet and projected onto a screen. Images were organized into three categories: Neighborhoods; Commercial Corridors & Districts; and Streets, Parking and Public Spaces. Participants were asked to record their impressions of the images on a scale from negative five to positive five. After completing the survey, participants discussed their general impressions of the images and related planning issues. A small sample of surveys was tabulated each night and the top ten and bottom ten images were reported and discussed.

A brief summary of the survey results follows:

General Findings. In general, participants responded favorably to images showing active, pedestrian-friendly environments, streets with generous landscaping, brick sidewalks, and outdoor cafes, and images of well-maintained public spaces, including urban plazas and natural park settings. Images receiving the lowest ranking showed commercial strips, billboards, pole-mounted and large commercial

signs, parking lots with minimal landscaping, and unadorned buildings. The photograph of a recently constructed stormwater facility lacking landscaping received the lowest rating.

Neighborhoods. Overall, images of houses with porches and rear yard garages, and neighborhoods with narrow streets, on-street or alley parking, sidewalks, and street trees scored highly, while images of residential streets with multiple curb cuts, front yard parking, and minimal landscaping scored poorly. Participants strongly favored images of newer neighborhoods with qualities like those in the City's older neighborhoods, walkable streets and sidewalks, street trees, and traditional housing forms and buildings materials. In discussions, survey participants pointed to the presence of mature trees, brick sidewalks, and well-tended landscaping as factors influencing their scores.

The density of projects seems to have had little influence on perceptions. In fact, the image of a single family house in the new urbanist development of Kentlands, Maryland received one of the top ten scores on the entire survey. The house exists on a relatively small lot (less than one quarter acre) in a moderately dense development that includes a wide range of housing types—from single family houses to townhouses, multistory condominiums, garage apartments and rental units above shops and offices.

Figure 6-1.

Single Family Housing



+1.74



+0.24

Participants responded favorably to the image of the house with a front porch and rear-yard garage and less favorably to the image of the house with a large garage as the dominant street-front design feature.

Design, Character & Quality

Figure 6-2.

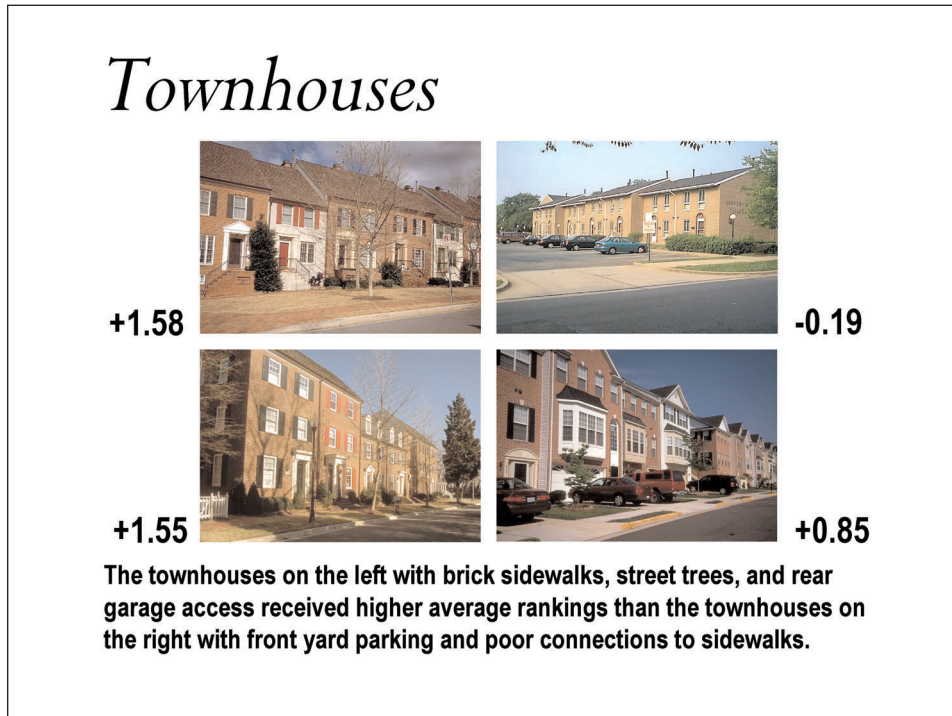
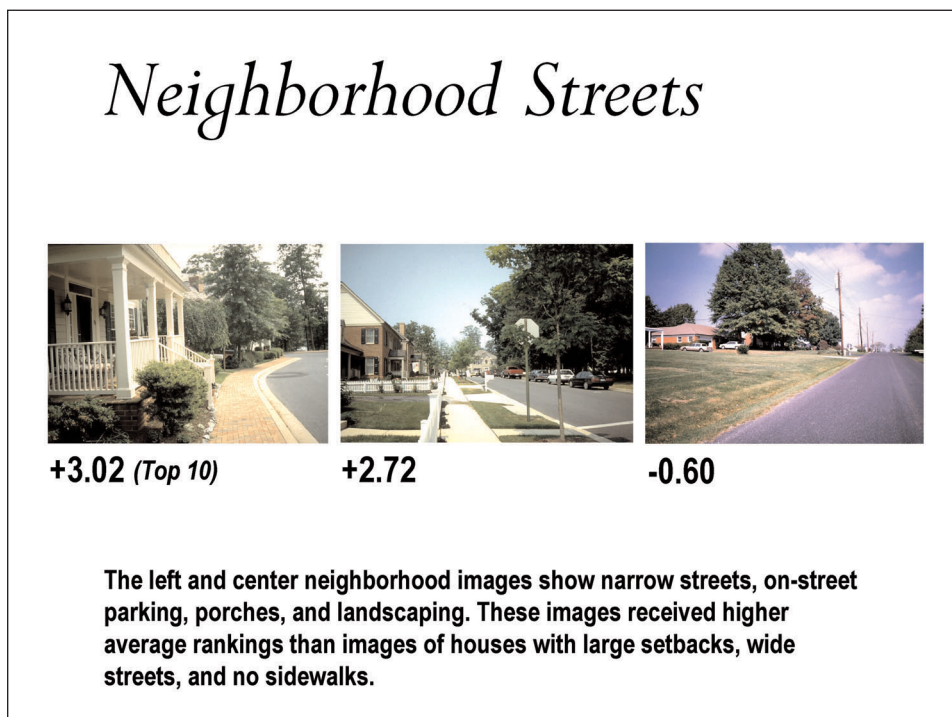


Figure 6-3.



Commercial Corridors and Districts. Images receiving high marks were of historic and newly developed commercial areas following “Main Street” design conventions—human-scale buildings, stores with sidewalk frontage, and streets with on-street parking, street trees, pedestrian-scale lighting, banners, benches, and decorative planting. Participants responded favorably to images showing active streetscapes—images of outdoor cafés, for example, received very high marks (the image of a popular local restaurant on Rivermont Avenue was ranked in the top ten overall)—and generously landscaped sites, sidewalks, and parking areas. As with the neighborhood and housing images, the highest ranking commercial area images were those that shared many of the qualities of Lynchburg’s downtown and historic areas.

Figure 6-4.

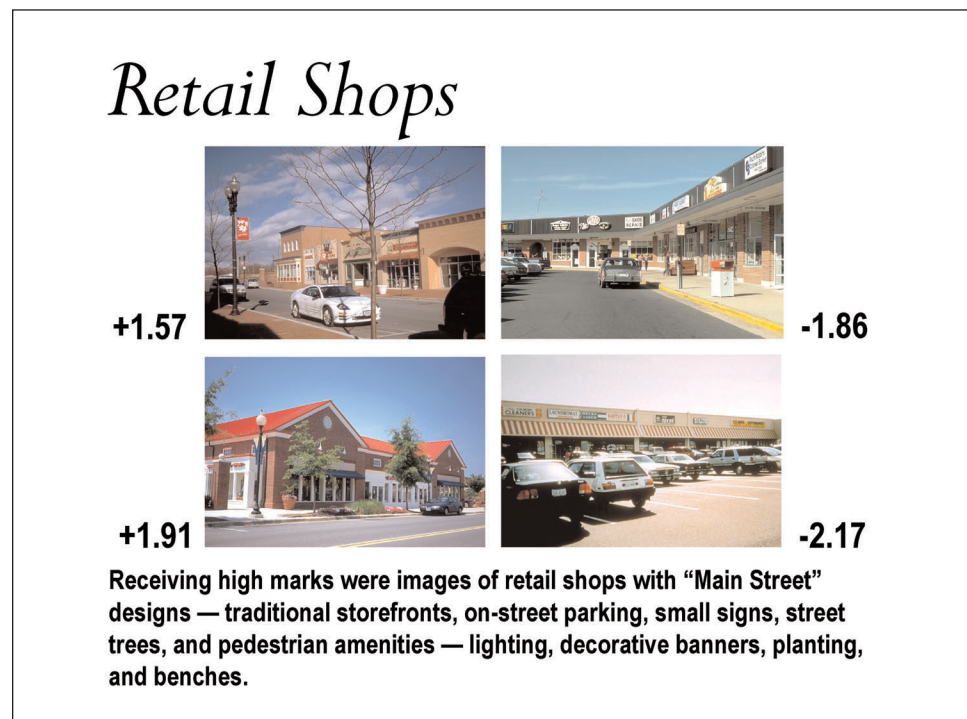
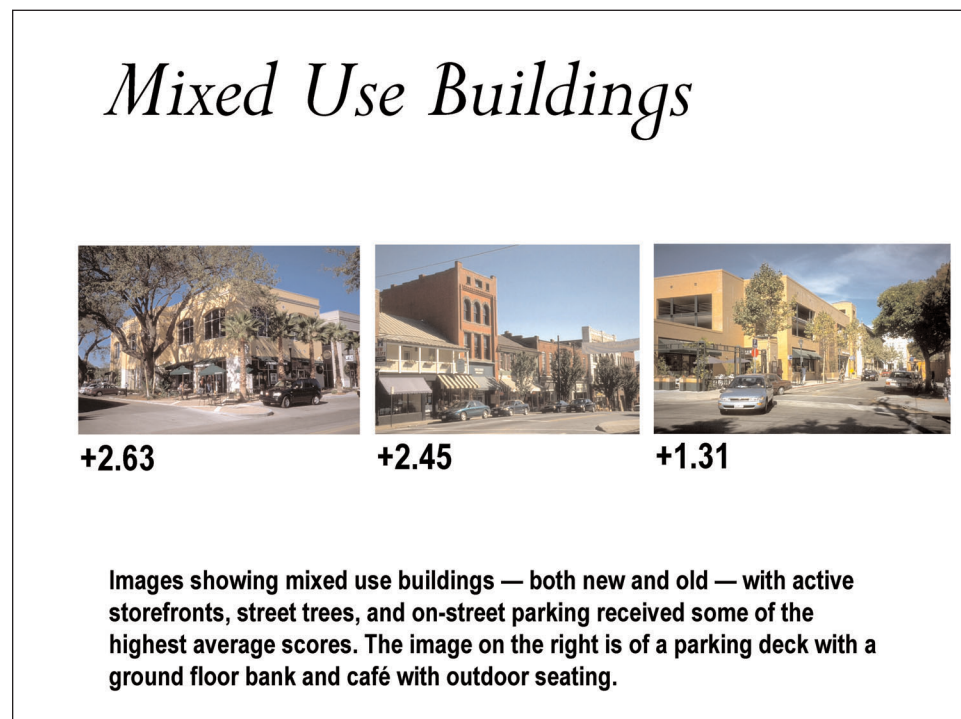


Figure 6-5.

This portion of the survey also included images of national franchise or chain stores from throughout the region. Images of conventional, “off-the shelf” designs for gas stations, fast food outlets, self-storage facilities, drug stores, video stores, and “big box” stores were shown, as were images of buildings and sites designed to fit a community’s design character. Commercial projects with architectural interest and generous landscaping scored significantly higher than the more conventional, suburban designs. For example, images of service stations with pitched roof canopies, brick facades, and small-scale signs received higher than average scores, as did projects with articulated entries, display windows, pedestrian-scale exterior lighting, and landscaping. Overall, the “off the shelf” designs ranked among the lowest in the survey.

Figure 6-6.

Franchise Design

**+1.62****+1.33****-1.67**

As shown in the left and center images, national chains often design buildings to compliment a community's design character. The image on the right, of a conventional design, received a much lower ranking than the others.

Figure 6-7.

Franchise Design

**+1.97****-2.22**

Images of sensitively designed national chain stores received much higher average scores than chain stores with conventional suburban designs.

Design, Character & Quality

Figure 6-8.

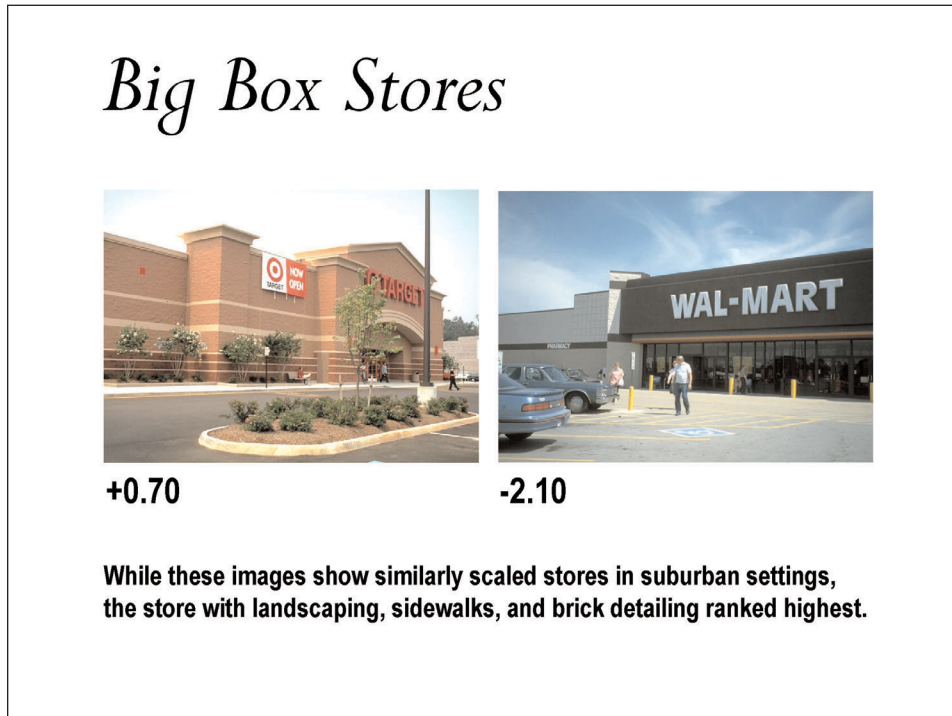
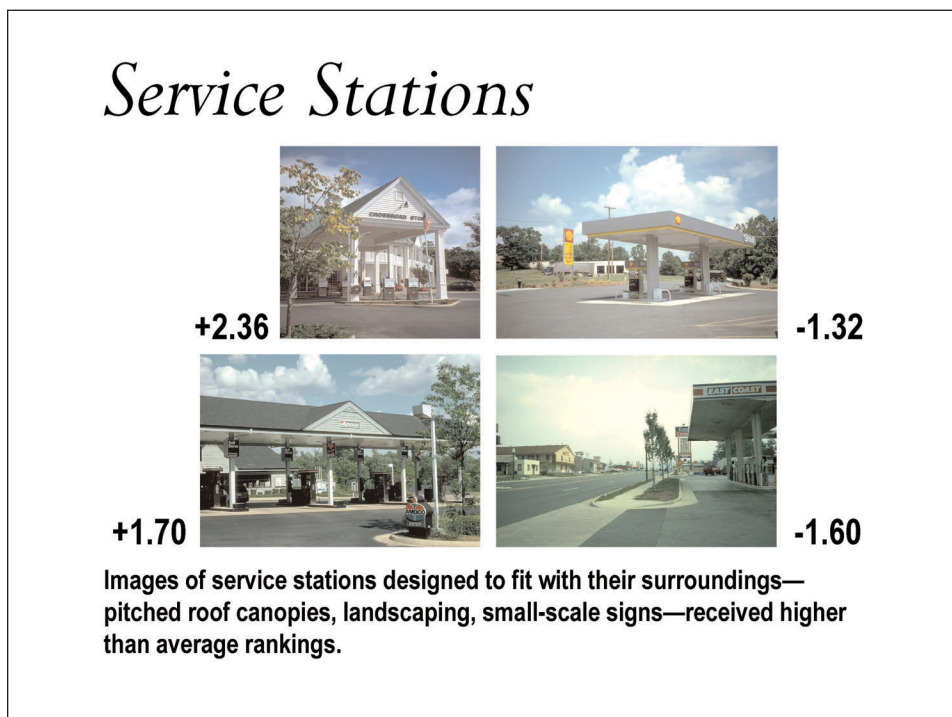
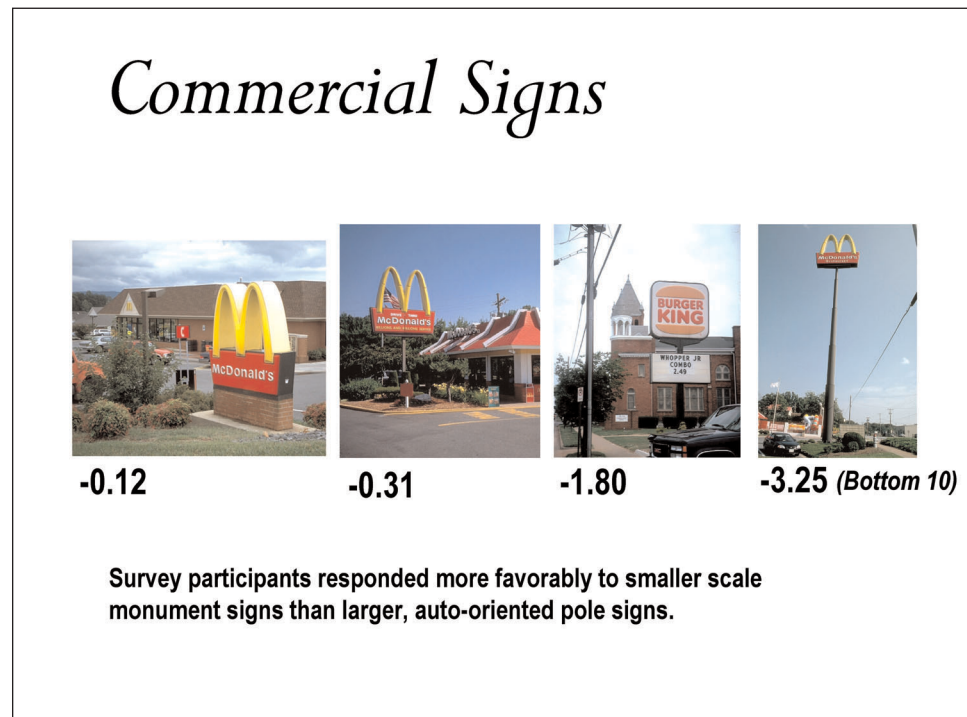


Figure 6-9.



Images of signs also were included in this section of the survey. As anticipated, none of the sign images were ranked particularly high; the images of large pole-mounted signs and billboards received some of the lowest scores in the survey.

Figure 6-10.



Streets, Parking & Public Spaces. In this section of the survey, participants responded most favorably to images of streets, squares, and parking lots with mature shade trees, planting beds, brick sidewalks and crosswalks, and environmentally-sensitive drainage facilities.

Streets receiving high scores shared the following design characteristics:

- Mature trees lined the street
- Buildings or landscaping screened parking from view
- Utilities had been placed underground or relocated
- Pedestrian amenities—lights, benches, and crosswalks—were present
- Commercial signs were visible, but sensitively designed
- Sidewalks were made of brick or decorative paving

The scale or capacity of streets seemed to have little influence over the rankings. Images of arterials (4- to 6-lane roads with center turn lanes) received both high and low marks. Scores were affected by design character rather than street width or capacity.

Figure 6-11.

Commercial Streets

**+2.94****-1.82**

Active, traditional streetscapes, with human-scaled buildings framing public space, mature street trees, wide sidewalks, and pedestrian-scaled lighting, were favored over auto-oriented commercial streetscapes. (Note: Of the streets pictured above, the one on the left carries more traffic each day than the one on the right.)

Figure 6-12.

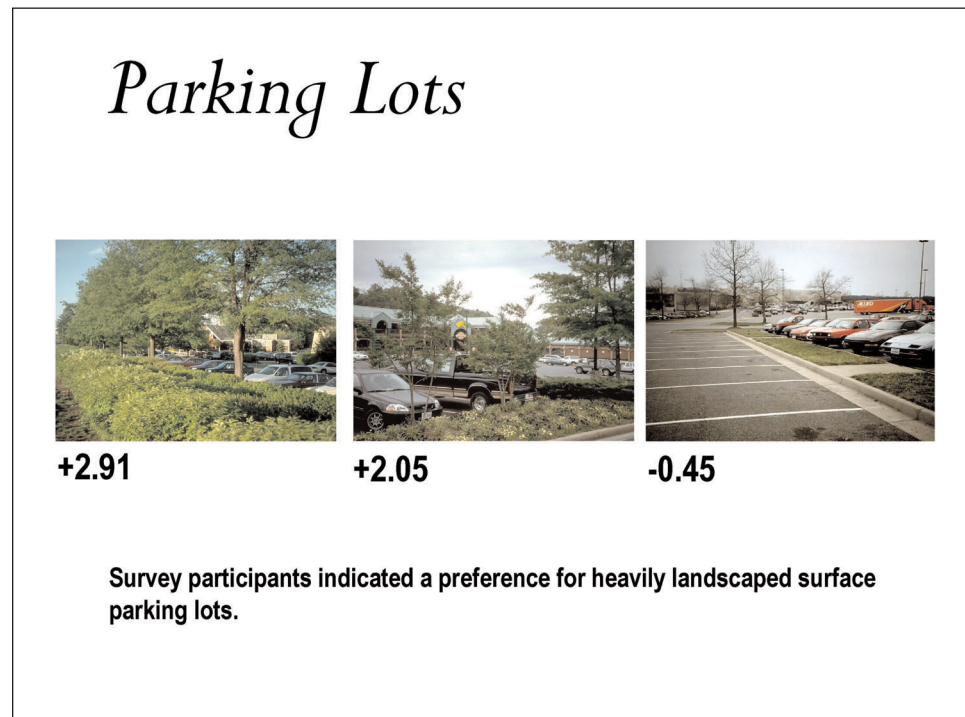
Commercial Streets

**+2.29****-3.19 (Bottom 10)****+2.61****-3.33 (Bottom 10)**

Images of commercial streets with large signs, minimal landscaping, overhead utilities, and multiple curb cuts received some of the lowest scores in the survey.

The survey also included images of parking lots and multi-story parking garages. As with the scores for public streets, parking areas with shade trees and well-maintained planting beds scored higher than those without. The quality of pedestrian circulation also seems to have influenced the scores—lots with well-marked crosswalks and brick sidewalks scored higher than those without. Parking garages with active ground floor uses (i.e., retail), well-designed facades, and generous landscaping received higher scores.

Figure 6-13.



Several images of stormwater management facilities also were included in the survey, including images of recently completed retention ponds along Wards Road. The images of the facilities on Wards Road, built in compliance with current City requirements, were among the lowest ranked ones in this survey. Images of other stormwater facilities, including a facility at Murrell Road and Lakeside Drive, received very high average scores, placing them in the top 10 percent of the images surveyed. The low-ranking facilities showed eroding banks, significant sedimentation, and minimal landscaping, while the high-ranking facilities illustrated how thoughtfully designed stormwater management facilities can serve as important landscape amenities.

Figure 6-14.

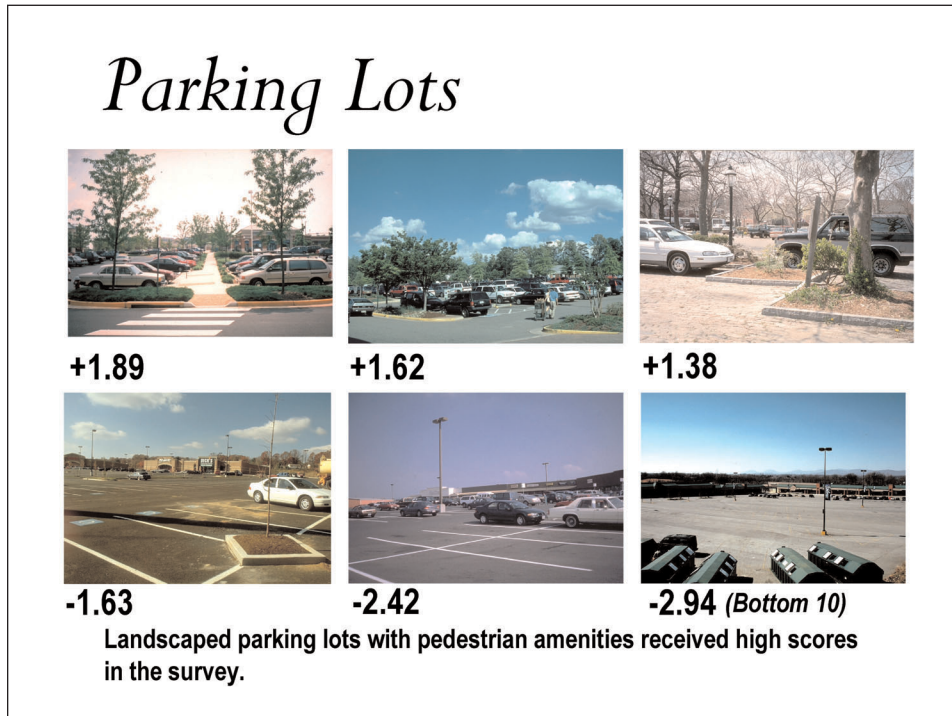
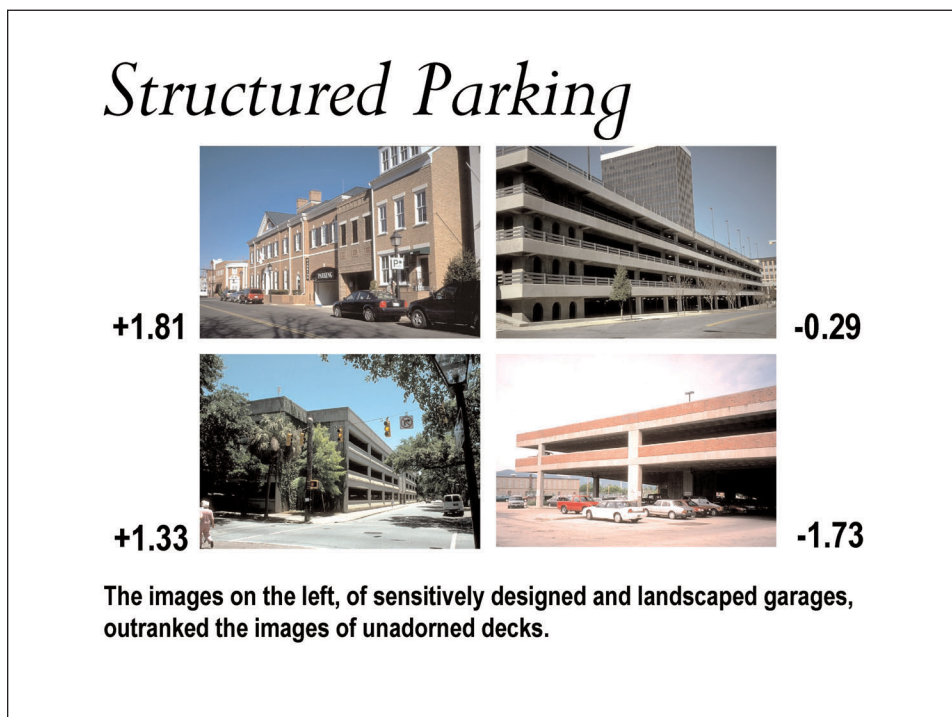


Figure 6-15.



Planning Implications. The survey results and related discussions highlighted the important role design plays in shaping the City's livability. Throughout the planning process, citizens expressed concern about the quality and character of development and called on the City to set higher design standards for private development and public investment. Such feedback provides an important foundation for the review of City standards, policies, and guidelines for private development and public investment.

Figure 6-16.

Stormwater Management



+3.88 (Top 10)

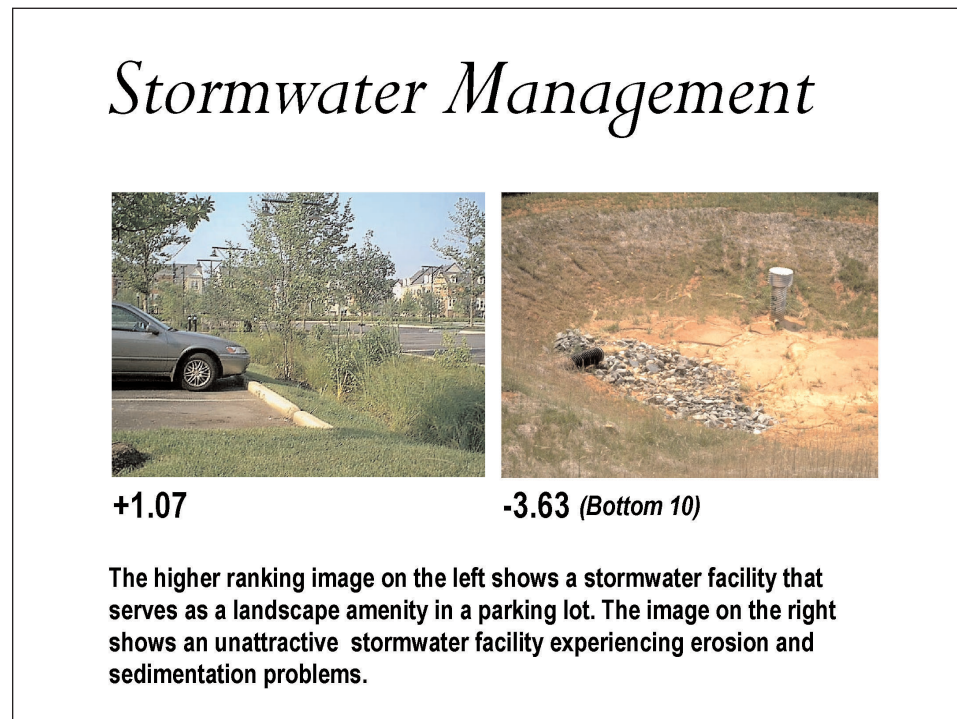


+2.97 (Top 10)



-3.21 (Bottom 10)

The left and center images, showing stormwater management facilities designed as development amenities, received high scores. The image on the right, of a stormwater facility at the entrance of a new retail development, received one of the lowest scores.

Figure 6-17.

Types of Existing Site & Building Design Standards

Existing development regulations, primarily the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances, and the Historic District portion of the Zoning Ordinance, can exert a powerful influence on the design quality and character of private development in the City. However, the extent of the influence varies greatly. Some provisions, such as the requirements of the Historic District Ordinance, require compliance with a very detailed set of design guidelines. Other provisions, such as the landscaping requirements in the commercial districts, provide only minimal requirements. A brief review of the nature and extent of the design influence of city codes follows.

Zoning and Subdivision Ordinance Requirements

While they have only a minor effect on building design and architectural character, zoning and subdivision regulations strongly influence the form of development. In addition to setting permitted land uses and densities, ordinances provide standards for building heights and setbacks, site access and circulation, landscaping, buffering, preservation of natural features, and location and layout of parking and loading areas. Important features of all recent developments—including the number of trees in parking lots, the size and location of signs, the distance of a building from the street or surrounding properties—are governed by the City's zoning and subdivision regulations.

Special Districts

To provide for greater flexibility and creativity, and increased focus on design issues, the City has established the following special districts: Planned Unit Development, Cluster Commercial Development, Conditional Zone, and Traditional Neighborhood Development. With the special districts, property owners may seek rezoning of a property conditioned upon compliance with the standards in the ordinance and proffered design standards or guidelines.

Overlay Zone District Provisions

In response to unique conditions or specific public objectives, the City has adopted several Overlay Zone Districts to guide development. Existing overlay districts include the Scenic Corridor Overlay District (covering property fronting Boonsboro Road, the Lynchburg Expressway, and Graves Mill Road), the Commercial Corridor Overlay District (covering Timberlake Road); and the Airport Safety Overlay District (covering flight paths). Each district includes design-related standards for specific areas of the City. For example, the Scenic Corridor Overlay District includes enhanced buffer and landscape standards to protect the scenic quality of properties along Boonsboro Road, the Lynchburg Expressway, and Graves Mill Road. City staff and the Planning Commission have sole responsibility for the administration of the standards in the district.

Historic District and the Historic District Advisory Area

The City's six Historic Districts and two Historic District Advisory Areas provide for the review of development and redevelopment projects for conformance with adopted design guidelines. The Historic Districts are Diamond Hill, Garland Hill, Court House Hill, Federal Hill, Daniel's Hill, and Rivermont Avenue. The two advisory areas are the Downtown and the Lower Basin. For areas designated as Historic Districts, conformance with design guidelines, as interpreted by the Historic Preservation Commission, is mandatory. For the areas designated as Historic District Advisory Areas, conformance with design guidelines, as interpreted by the Design Review Board, is advisory only. (Additional information and recommendations regarding these districts are included in Chapter 11, History, Culture, Education & the Arts.)

Table 6.1: Existing Tools for Design Improvement

Zone District	Design Guidelines	Review Board	Review Board Authority
Historic District	Yes	Yes; Historic Preservation Commission	Mandatory with Appeal Provisions
Historic District Advisory Area (B-6) (B-4)	Yes	Yes; Design Review Board	Advisory Only
Traditional Neighborhood Development, Planned Unit Development, Cluster Commercial Development, and Conditional Zone	Yes; Proffered by Developer	No; Staff and Planning Commission Conduct Review. For TNDs, Design Review Board	Mandatory with Appeal Provisions.
Overlay Zones—Scenic Corridor, Commercial Corridor and Airport Safety	No; Standards Included in Ordinance	No; Staff and Planning Commission Conduct Review	N/A

Design, Character & Quality

To improve design quality and ensure that new development and redevelopment occur in a manner consistent with the city's architectural and urban design traditions, the City has a number of options, ranging from the improvement of existing standards and review procedures, to the establishment of new guidelines and review boards. Excellent models for such improvements exist in localities across the Commonwealth.

Obtaining Good Design in Lynchburg**Design Standards in Existing Districts**

The minimum standards for landscaping and site design improvements for existing zoning districts are insufficient to accomplish the community's design quality objectives. The City should conduct a thorough review of existing ordinances to determine opportunities for improvement.

Specific improvements recommended include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Increase requirements for landscaping and screening of parking areas, including increased landscaping requirements for impervious surfaces and planting of shade trees;
- Incorporate more stringent standards for the improved aesthetics and maintenance of stormwater management facilities;
- Provide flexibility in setback requirements for retail uses in areas where walking is encouraged (existing standards prohibit the creation of pedestrian-oriented streets);
- Limit the size and height of new on-site commercial signs;
- Require tree preservation or replacement where removal is unavoidable;
- Provide performance standards, such as establishing setbacks for developed areas based on existing conditions rather than a generic standard, to ensure that infill development is compatible with its surroundings;
- Improve standards for outdoor lighting that restrict light trespass, sky glow, glare, and unnecessarily bright light levels;
- Incorporate pedestrian and transit facilities and amenities in commercial developments, including the provision of cross-parcel pedestrian access and pedestrian connections to surrounding public streets, sidewalks, and trails; and
- Require sidewalks in new residential developments along major corridors.

Revisions to Existing Overlay Zones

A review to determine the effectiveness of the Scenic and Commercial Corridor Overlay Districts is recommended. A review of existing code provisions suggests that the standards for buffering and landscaping may be inadequate or inappropriate to meet the stated objectives of the districts.

New Overlay Districts for Improvement Corridors

To improve conditions along the City's major travel corridors, the City should prepare detailed design standards and development plans for the following areas: the Crosstown Connector, Timberlake Road, Wards Road/Candlers Mountain Road, Old Forest Road, Campbell Avenue, and Boonsboro Road. In addition to addressing the mix of uses and development intensity, plans and standards for these improvement corridors should address the design character of new development, commercial signs, opportunities for infill and redevelopment, appropriate landscape treatments, buffer requirements, and pedestrian amenities.

The corridor development plans could be implemented through the application of a modified version of the existing Commercial Corridor Overlay District or through the establishment of a district such as Albemarle County's Entrance Corridor Overlay District. The districts, known generally as entrance corridor overlay districts, set forth design standards for corridors defined under Virginia law section 15.2-2306 as "significant routes of tourist access to the locality or to designated historic landmarks, buildings, structures, or districts." Under the enabling legislation, localities may establish a review board to administer the district and determine if proposed projects meet the established design guidelines. For example, Albemarle County's district is administered by an appointed review committee and encourages the use of traditional building materials, the screening of mechanical equipment, the placement of building entries and windows along sidewalks, the use of traditional roof forms, and the design of small-scale monument signs. The Historic Preservation Commission could be assigned this administrative responsibility, as is done in other communities.

Design Character Analysis

The City should also conduct an analysis or survey to document the unique and characteristic design features of the City's older neighborhoods and traditional commercial districts. The survey would serve as a useful educational and reference tool for staff and community stakeholders in the development of design standards and guidelines, as well as for distribution to property owners and developers. The booklet "Shaping the Design of Chesterfield County," prepared by that locality's planning office, provides a model worthy of review.

Design Awareness

The City should support the development of programs and initiatives that help raise public awareness of the importance of good design. These could include development of a slide presentation on good design as an educational tool for both adults and children, preparation and inclusion of design and planning programs in local school curricula, and an awards program for excellence in design.

Design, Character & Quality***City Gateways***

The City's gateways, places where the regional road network crosses city boundaries, serve as the community's front door, establishing first impressions and reinforcing images and perceptions of Lynchburg's quality of life and vitality.

The John Lynch Memorial Bridge, which affords an unparalleled panoramic view of the City's skyline and provides direct access to downtown, major visitor destinations, and visitor support services, is identified as a major gateway. The Lynch Bridge leads to Fifth Street, one of the City's revitalization areas.

Major gateways, heavily traveled entries where four-lane roads cross from surrounding counties to the City, include:

- US Route 29 Bypass (existing) at the Carter Glass Memorial Bridge
- US Route 29 Bypass (future)/US Route 460 Interchange in the Tyreeanna/Pleasant Valley neighborhood
- Campbell Avenue /US Route 460 Interchange
- US Route 460 /US Route 501 Interchange (near the River Ridge Mall)
- Wards Road and the US Route 460/US Route 29 Interchange (near the Airport);
- Boonsboro Road
- Timberlake Road
- Lakeside Drive and the Lakeside Drive/Lynchburg Expressway Interchange (future)

Minor Gateways, entrances where secondary (typically two-lane) roads on the region's designated Thoroughfare Network, cross the City boundary, include:

- Candler's Mountain Road
- Leesville Road
- Graves Mill Road
- Coffee Road
- Enterprise Drive
- Trents Ferry Road

For each gateway, the City should work in partnership with VDOT and area property owners to develop improvement plans. Such plans should identify opportunities for landscape improvements, entry signs, and potential improvements to surrounding properties, as well as a long-term maintenance plan.

Public Investments

Design, character, and quality are also influenced by the investment decisions of public agencies, most notably the City and the Virginia Department of Transportation. Consider, for example, the influence VDOT and the City's Department of Public Works have had on the City's image. With approximately 13 percent of the City's land area dedicated to transportation infrastructure, the condition of streets and rights-of-way has a powerful effect on the City's image. From small actions, like removing the asphalt from historic brick streets or controlling where signs are placed within public rights-of-way, to the construction

of the US Route 29 Bypass, US Route 460 and the Expressway, the public sector's contribution to design quality cannot be underestimated.

In order to build on the City's tradition of constructing quality public buildings, streets, and spaces, several actions are necessary. The City and other public agencies should provide opportunities for public comment on proposed public improvements, should continue to work closely with state and federal agencies to ensure design compatibility and sensitivity, and should work to ensure allocation of sufficient funds for capital improvements to support quality projects.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

In the past decade, the role site and building design play in creating safe and secure environments has become the subject of great attention. In fact, an entire design and planning discipline has developed to study how design decisions influence criminal behavior and public perceptions of safety and security. This discipline is known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

Henrico County has taken a leading role in the development and application of CPTED through its police and planning departments. The county has adopted CPTED language into its current Comprehensive Plan. The county has also recently completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan that includes a special section addressing safety and security and embodying CPTED in its goals and objectives. Additional best practices based on CPTED principles are found in the City of Petersburg, which has a CPTED planner for city schools; Virginia Beach, which is adopting CPTED through a coordinated effort between the planning and police departments; and Fairfax County, which is looking at CPTED and its role in crime reduction.

The City should continue coordinating development review with the Police and Fire Departments, complete risk assessments for proposed public facilities, and identify opportunities to incorporate CPTED principles in the Zoning and Subdivision Ordinances.

Goals, Objectives & Strategies

Goal 1. Ensure that development and redevelopment reinforce the City's unique character and sense of place.

Objective 1.A. Site and Building Design Standards. Expand efforts to improve the quality and character of private development.

- 1) Prepare design guidelines and establish design review board(s) for Overlay Districts, Improvement Corridors, and Revitalization Areas in the City. Where appropriate, the City may assign new responsibilities to the existing design review board, rather than create additional boards.
- 2) Require that new buildings and signs be designed to complement the character and quality of existing development.

Design, Character & Quality

- 3) Conduct an analysis of historic and traditional buildings to identify design features and treatments that contribute to the City's unique design character. Use this analysis as the basis for the development of design standards and guidelines.
- 4) Require that, wherever possible, parking areas be located to the side and/or rear of buildings and maintain a human scale by incorporating pedestrian walkways, landscaping, and adequate lighting. Large open expanses of parking in front of buildings should be avoided. Where it is not possible to avoid parking in front, extensive landscaping should be required.
- 5) Restrict the placement of off-site, outdoor advertising (billboards) in the City, especially in or near residential areas, schools, parks, historic sites and districts, scenic areas, gateways, and commercial areas.
- 6) Limit reinvestment in existing billboards and explore strategies for their eventual removal through purchase programs or sunset provisions.

Objective 1.B. Sustainable Design. Promote energy efficiency, sustainability, and green-building strategies in planning for new development and redevelopment. Strategies to achieve sustainable design are found in Chapter 12, Natural Systems, Goals 3 and 4.

Objective 1.C. Pedestrian Circulation. Encourage site and building designs that accommodate the needs of pedestrians, disabled persons, and transit-dependent people.

- 1) To create active pedestrian environments, encourage commercial development with sidewalk frontage, nonreflective windows, street entries, canopies and awnings, and pedestrian-scale lighting and signs; and residential development with shallow front yard setbacks, porches, and rear yard parking.
- 2) Require all new development along traditional commercial streets to match the setbacks of adjacent buildings and to locate primary building entries on a sidewalk.
- 3) Require that site and building designs support the safe and convenient circulation of pedestrians and persons with disabilities.
 - a) Through the site plan review process, ensure the adequacy of facilities for pedestrians and persons with disabilities.
 - b) Encourage the provision of cross-parcel pedestrian connections in commercial areas and between commercial areas and adjacent neighborhoods.
 - c) Ensure that transit stops on private properties have adequate pedestrian connections and are located in close proximity to destinations.
- 4) Include the GLTC in plan review so that existing and proposed bus routes are considered during planning for new developments.

Objective 1.D. Design for Security. Incorporate Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in development regulations and review processes.

- 1) Continue the practice of involving the Police and Fire departments in the review of subdivision and site plans.
- 2) Conduct CPTED assessments of existing and proposed public facilities, identifying potential safety or security risks.
- 3) Identify opportunities to incorporate CPTED principles in the City's zoning and subdivision regulations.

Objective 1.E. Outdoor Lighting. Maximize the effectiveness and energy efficiency of outdoor lighting, while minimizing its spillover effects in order to increase driver safety and residential privacy.

- 1) Improve ordinances addressing outdoor lighting issues in new development and during the renovation of existing developments.
- 2) Conduct a review of outdoor lighting on public properties and identify potential improvements.

Design, Character & Quality

- 3) Prepare policies and practices to guide City investment in outdoor lighting.
- 4) Ensure that public outdoor lighting in Historic Districts is an appropriate height and of a suitable design.

Objective 1.F. Landscaping and Trees. Preserve and incorporate existing vegetation and trees into site designs to the greatest extent possible, in order to create a natural appearance and the impression of a mature landscape.

- 1) Prepare an ordinance establishing tree cover standards in private developments through the preservation or replacement of existing trees or the planting of new trees.
- 2) Encourage the use of indigenous, drought-tolerant plant materials and prepare lists of species appropriate for different environments and applications.

Objective 1.G. Compatibility/Buffers. Ensure the compatibility of adjacent land uses through the development and enforcement of buffer requirements.

- 1) Review existing buffer requirements and their effectiveness; amend them as appropriate.
- 2) Consider developing performance-based requirements that provide a range of alternatives to accomplish compatibility objectives, such as landscaped buffers, architectural design, and site planning techniques.

Objective 1.H. Property Maintenance. Enhance the visual attractiveness and image of the City by encouraging owners to keep and maintain their property and surrounding areas in good repair.

- 1) Expand the use of rigorous code enforcement to promote the improvement or sale of properties that are not adequately maintained.
- 2) Target code enforcement activities in areas experiencing the highest levels of deterioration and disinvestment.
- 3) Continue/expand the program of posting signs and publishing lists of owners of dilapidated, abandoned, and/or tax delinquent properties.
- 4) Develop a program to address the maintenance of properties owned by out-of-state, absentee landlords.
- 5) Develop a citywide Rental Housing Registration and Inspection Program to address all rental properties that do not meet building code standards.

Objective 1.I. Awareness and Education. Increase public awareness of the importance of quality design and development in improving livability and economic vitality.

- 1) Support the establishment of an annual design awards program to recognize outstanding design, development, and rehabilitation projects.
- 2) Prepare a presentation that highlights the City's unique design character, sense of place, and natural setting. The presentation could be given to schoolchildren, neighborhood and civic groups, service organizations and others, and posted on the City's web site.
- 3) Encourage schools to incorporate design and planning awareness programs in their curricula.

Goal 2. Reinforce positive images of the City through landscaping and design improvements at the City's gateways and along major travel corridors.

Objective 2.A. Gateway Designation & Improvement. Improve conditions at the City's gateways.

- 1) Working with VDOT and Amherst County, prepare plans for designation of the John Lynch Bridge as the northern entry to the City, and install directional signage and landscape improvements along the route connecting the Rte 29/Madison Heights Bypass to the John Lynch Bridge.

Design, Character & Quality

- 2) Develop, in collaboration with VDOT and private property owners, improvement plans for the other major and minor gateways to the City.

Goal 3. Ensure that the design of streets and public facilities reinforces the City's unique character and sense of place.

Objective 3.A. Design of Public Facilities. Build on existing City efforts to ensure design quality and sensitivity in new and renovated public facilities.

- 1) Establish design guidelines for public facilities.
- 2) Ensure that new or renovated public facilities are compatible with their surroundings and, to the extent possible, serve neighborhood needs.
- 3) Provide opportunities for public comment on building and site design for new or renovated public facilities.
- 4) Work with state and federal agencies to ensure compatibility and design sensitivity in new and renovated facilities.
- 5) Ensure that sufficient funding is allocated to capital improvement projects for detailed planning and quality design work.